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TELEPHONE 919-682-2913

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## Florida felon voting rights restoration bill draws concerns

### Dems Say This New Republican 'Poll Tax'

By BRENDAN FARRINGTON

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — A bill that sets conditions on restoring felon voting rights won approval March 19 from a Florida House committee over the objection of advocates who helped get rights restoration placed in the state constitution.

Advocates said the language goes too far, in part by requiring civil fines and court costs to be paid before felons can have their voting rights restored.

"That will restrict the ability to vote for thousands of Floridians, especially people who are poor, especially people of color," said Neil Volz, political director for the Florida Rights Restoration Coalition.

Volz said financial obligations should be considered only if a judge specifically made that part of an offender's sentencing, such as restitution to victims. He also argued that the Legislature doesn't need a bill to spell out a process for voting rights restoration.

The House Criminal Justice Subcommittee approved the bill, 10-5, with Republicans in support and only Democrats opposed.

Voters approved a constitutional amendment in November that restores felons' voting rights once they've completed their sentences, unless they were convicted of murder or a sexual felony.

Republican Rep. James Grant said the amendment approved by voters didn't define what it means to complete a sentence and didn't define sexual felony. He rebuked advocates for felons who contended the bill language was politically motivated.

Citing court transcripts, Grant said that when lawyers representing the advocates for felons explained the ballot language to the Supreme Court, they said court costs and fees would be part of completing a sentence and other details would have to be worked out in implementing the amendment.

Democratic Rep. Adam Hattersley said the bill represents the arrogance of lawmakers who think they know better than the 64 percent of the voters who approved the bill.

"It's not only targeting the poor and is targeting minorities, but it's blatantly unconstitutional as a poll tax," said Hattersley. "The will of the voters is clear, and this bill is trying to circumvent that."

Grant shot back at Hattersley as he made his final arguments for the bill.

### Republican Steve King: Katrina victims only asked for help, unlike Iowans

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republican Steve King says he was told that victims of Hurricane Katrina only asked for help, unlike people in his home state of Iowa, who "take care of each other."

The Iowa congressman told a town hall meeting in Charter Oak he visited New Orleans multiple times after the deadly 2005 storm.

Referring to the Federal Emergency Management Agency, he said: "Here's what FEMA tells me: We go to a place like New Orleans and everybody's looking around saying, 'Who's gonna help me, who's gonna help me?' When FEMA responds to problems in Iowa, they're just always gratified when they come and see how Iowans take care of each other."

New Orleans is mostly black. The storm crossed the tip of Florida and then swept into the Gulf of Mexico and over Louisiana and Mississippi, causing more than 1,800 deaths and an estimated \$108 billion in damage. It was the costliest hurricane in U.S. history, according to the National Hurricane Center, with most of the fatalities occurring in Louisiana after levees failed and 80 percent of the city was flooded.

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds said that recent flooding in the state has caused an estimated \$1.6 billion in damage. Reynolds sent a letter asking President Donald Trump to quickly issue a disaster declaration for 57 counties in Iowa that have been severely impacted by flooding.

House Republican Whip Steve Scalise, who was born in New Orleans, responded to King in a statement saying, "His comments about Katrina victims are absurd and offensive, and are a complete contradiction to the strength and resilience the people of New Orleans demonstrated to the entire nation in the wake of the total devastation they experienced." Scalise's district includes part of the city.

It was the latest slap from House Republican leaders to King. Earlier this year, they punished him for comments about race, most recently stripping King of his committee assignments.

Associated Press writer Rebecca Santana contributed.



The award was presented to Michaux by NCAE President Mark Jewell on Friday, March 22

### Durham Politician, Civil Rights Leader Mickey Michaux is the Recipient of the 2019 NCAE President's Award

RALEIGH — Rep. Mickey Michaux, a fixture in the North Carolina General Assembly for 43 years, is the 2019 recipient of the NCAE President's Award, presented annually to an individual or organization in recognition of outstanding work to advance the cause of public education in North Carolina.

Michaux, who is retiring from elected office, was encouraged to enter politics by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. He worked closely with the civil rights legend and was responsible for inviting him to Durham in 1956. It would be the first of many times that Dr. King stayed with Michaux when visiting North Carolina.

In the mid-1960s, Michaux entered several political races unsuccessfully, but began making a name for himself as civil rights activist. When he joined the Legislature, he was the third African American ever elected. As a lawmaker, he crafted legislation to merge the Durham city and county school systems, worked to acquire funding for North Carolina Central University, his alma mater, and other historically black colleges and universities, and was a tireless advocate for public education. As a member of the General Assembly, he has served on the Subcommittee on Appropriations for Education, the Pension and Retirement Committee, and Subcommittee on Education for Universities.

As the longest serving member of the North Carolina House of Representatives, Michaux is also a staunch supporter of voter rights, the rights of all people, and free speech. "NCAE applauds Rep. Michaux for his many years of service to the people of North Carolina, especially the students and educators of our public schools," said NCAE President Mark Jewell. "He has always been a champion for public education and for that, we are most appreciative. He has dedicated his political career to ensuring that North Carolina's schools are places where students can be successful. We thank him for unwavering commitment and know that the legacy he started so many years ago will live on."

The award was presented to Michaux by NCAE President Mark Jewell on Friday, March 22, during the Association's 49th Convention and Representative Assembly at

### Justice Thomas talks at court arguments, 1st time in 3 years, Appears to Side With White Prosecutor

By Mark Sherman

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court was about to adjourn for the day when the Georgia baritone politely inquired of the lawyer at the lectern.

Justice Clarence Thomas, the court's only African-American member and lone Southerner, was breaking a three-year silence at high court arguments with a couple of questions in a case about racial discrimination in the South.



The case involves a black Mississippi death row inmate who's been tried six times for murder and a white prosecutor with a history of excluding African-Americans from juries by using peremptory strikes, for which no explanation is required. Prosecutor Doug Evans excused five African-Americans from the jury in inmate Curtis Flowers' sixth trial.

"Would you be kind enough to tell me whether or not you exercised any peremptories?" Thomas asked Sheri Lynn Johnson, Flowers' Supreme Court lawyer.

If so, Thomas wanted to know, "What was the race of the jurors?"

In Flowers' sixth trial, Johnson said, Flowers' lawyer excused three white jurors.

But the defense lawyer's "motivation is not the question here. The question is the motivation of Doug Evans," Johnson said.

Even Thomas' conservative colleagues seemed to favor Flowers in the course of the hourlong session, and the justice's questions seemed intended to show that both sides can be conscious of race in jury selection.

In a similar case from Georgia in 2016, Thomas was the only dissenter when the court ruled for a black Georgia inmate. Thomas wrote then that the Supreme Court should not second-guess a trial judge who initially considered and rejected racial discrimination claims.

Before March 20, Thomas' last questions were in a case about the reach of a federal law that bans people convicted of domestic violence from owning guns. Those were his first questions in 10 years.

He is the only justice who does not regularly pose questions from the bench. Thomas has explained that he relies on the written briefs and thinks his colleagues interrupt lawyers too often. As in 2016, he only piped up after everyone else was done.